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ABSTRACT

The influence of the mother in affecting her daughter's willingness to commit herself to a career as well as her perceptions of appropriate occupational choices were studied in a random sample of students in a two-year comprehensive community college. A structured questionnaire was administered to obtain basic demographic data and information about parents' occupations, work histories, and education, as well as information about the student's own career aspirations and plans. The occupational choice of the subject and the actual occupation of the mother were rated on the dimension of non-traditionality. Career commitment was determined by the total score obtained from the subject's responses to questions involving her intention to work after marriage and/or children. Results of the study showed that no relationship existed between the work history of the mother and the career choice of the subject. The mothers of the group were typically employed in office work or in occupations relating to housekeeping skills and/or child care. The dimension of career commitment yielded significant positive relationships with the length of time the subject's mother had been employed and whether she was presently working. These observations tend to support a modeling influence of mother upon daughter. It is concluded that young women need exposure to a wider variety of role-models, as well as increased information, support, and encouragement from faculty and counselors concerning entrance into non-traditional occupational areas. (DB)

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# CAREER CHOICE AND CAREER COMMITMENT OF TWO-YEAR COLLEGE WOMEN

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Increasing numbers of women are among the "new students" who are enrolling in the nation's two-year colleges as part of open door policies. Although in the past, many women students also sought post-secondary education in two-year colleges, their numbers have been swelled by students from varied backgrounds and by the recognition of the large group of women who were often categorized as "adult learners," "recreational learners" or "non-degree students." Recently, developments such as affirmative action programs have brought greater visibility and concern for women as women as well as for their specific educational needs and career goals. Although design of programs and changes in the traditional educational patterns have been a significant part of the institution's response to the special needs of the new students, the counselor and student personnel administrator have also emerged as critical staff members for encouraging and supporting women who seek occupational and personal development.

To date, little research has been available concerning important elements of women's experience in the two-year college. Even though the relatively recent growth of community colleges throughout the country has stimulated an accompanying need for information about the two-year college student, most of the existing research on student characteristics and college influence involves the four-year college or university. Further, although a number of studies have investigated both junior and senior college students, they frequently have not examined the characteristics and objectives of the women college students separately or in depth.

This lack of research specifically focused on women extends to the general area of career choice. While researchers such as Super (1963), Ginsberg (1951), Holland (1966) and others have attempted to provide generally applicable theories of vocational development, most of the actual research activity has centered on male subjects. The recent interest in the careers and work histories of women has resulted in directing attention to the special conditions which affect the decisions girls and women make concerning their educational preparation as well as their selection and choice of occupations. For this reason, Zytowski (1969) and Psathas (1968) support separate theories of career development for women. Each theory considers such factors as family background, social class and social mobility, motivation and reward as possibly operating in different ways for women than for men.

In accordance with such special interest in women's career decision-making, a number of other research studies have emphasized the importance of the mother as a role-model for her daughter. These studies are based on theories of modeling and identification (Lynn 1969; 1972) and the development of sex roles (Maccoby, 1966) which illustrate the process of early acquisition of sex role behavior. For example, although both males and females form a first attachment with the mother, the girl's modeling and identification with her mother is encouraged while the boy must learn to model and identify with the male role. Consequently, the girl's sex role learning is associated with an actual person rather than the abstract concept of role.

In particular, studies by Tangri (1969, 1972) and Almquist and Angrist (1970) have emphasized that the example provided by a working

mother, particularly a mother who was herself in an innovative or non-traditional occupation could be influential in the daughter's own choice of a non-traditional career field. Research by Astin (1969) who investigated the careers of females with doctoral degrees found that these women were more likely to be employed if their mothers worked.

Although most of the existing studies have focused on the four-year college woman, these research efforts suggest the influence of the mother in affecting her daughter's willingness to commit herself to a career as well as her perceptions of appropriate occupational choices. Since the two-year college provides an opportunity for students to prepare either for specific vocational goals or for transfer to another educational institution for further study, it appeared important to investigate whether these same factors influenced the decisions of women at this educational level. Increased understanding of such factors is especially desirable for counselors and two-year college personnel in working with the new student.

Survey Method

Data were obtained from a random sample of students enrolled in a two-year comprehensive community college in central New York State. A structured questionnaire was developed and field tested to obtain basic demographic data and information about parents' occupations, work histories and educations as well as information about the student's own career aspirations and plans. This instrument was administered at the end of the spring academic term to the sample of graduating students. These

students were selected since they were ending their two-year college experience and were close to entering the world of work or continuing their educations at other four-year colleges or universities. Both male and female students were included in the sample to permit comparisons and to prevent reactiveness and/or response bias. The response rate was 74.8 percent, a sample of 109 women and 78 men (n=187).

Scoring Method

The occupational choice of the subject and the actual occupation of her mother were rated on the dimension of non-traditionality according to the percentage of men currently reported in that occupation. Career commitment was determined by the total score obtained from the subject's responses to questions involving her intention to work after marriage and/or children. Thus, the most highly career-committed women were those who did not intend to marry or those who planned to marry but who expected to be working almost continuously, even if there were small children in the home. The occupational choice of the subject and her degree of career commitment were the dependent variables in the analysis.

Results

For the women in the sample, that no relationship was discovered between the work history of the mother and the career choice of the subject can be observed in Table 1. However, an examination of the occupations of the mothers of the subjects showed that these women, although working outside the home, were concentrated in the more

traditional or stereotypic occupations for females, offering restricted opportunities to distinguish associations among the variables. The mothers of this group were typically employed in office work or occupations relating to housekeeping skills and/or child care. However, it was noted that the subjects themselves aspired to higher levels of education than their parents and in fact, had already surpassed the educational attainments of more than 60 percent of their parents (see Table 2). Even though many of the subjects selected such traditional women's occupations as nursing and teaching, the choice of these occupations might be interpreted as an attempt at social mobility. Within a family group where the parents have not experienced post-secondary education, the woman's aspiration to a professional level occupation might be regarded as a significant attainment. Consequently, the established "women's occupations" might be perceived as providing the easiest means of access to professional careers.

Table 1. Pearson Correlation Coefficients -- Mother's Work History with Subject's Career Choice and Career Commitment (n=109)

| Item | Career Choice r | Career Commitment r |
|---|---|---|
| Number of years mother worked | .049 | .266** |
| Mother's occupation | .022 | .023 |
| Mother working now | .010 | .164* |

**p < .01
*p < .05

Table 2. Distribution of Students' Highest Anticipated Educational Level and Parents' Attained Educational Level

| Educational Level | Percent of Parents Highest Attained Level | | Percent of Subjects Anticipating Level |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Father | Mother | |
| Less than high school graduate | 35.1 | 17.7 | |
| High school graduate | 26.9 | 47.7 | |
| Some college* | 25.0 | 18.7 | 31.5 |
| College graduate | 8.3 | 13.1 | 27.8 |
| Advanced degree | 4.7 | 2.8 | 40.7 |
| Total | 100.0 | 100.0 | 100.0 |

*Note: For the subjects in the study, this category shows those who planned to complete the two-year degree or certificate program.

In contrast, the dimension of career commitment yielded significant positive relationships with the length of time the subject's mother had been employed and whether she was presently working. These observations tend to support a modeling influence of mother upon daughter. Since the college women in the study already differed from the majority of their mothers in the amount of education attained, it is likely that the amount of direct modeling influence is limited. In this instance women with working mothers may see that combining a career and marriage is possible. Likewise, in a home where both parents work there may be a decrease in distinction in the roles of the mother and the father. Home duties and responsibilities may be shared by both parents, diminishing the association of housework with the female role and

enabling the daughter to perceive herself in a less traditional manner. As a result the young woman may choose from a wider assortment of career options and view employment in a career as part of her life plan.

Although women in two-year college transfer programs might be assumed to be aspiring to professional-level careers with the possibility of greater participation in non-traditional or innovative careers, no relationships were discovered between the variables of mother's work history and whether or not the daughter was in an occupational or transfer program (see Table 3).

Table 3. Means, Standard Deviations and t Scores - Mother's Work History for Occupational and Transfer Program Women. (n=109)

| Item | Transfer $\bar{x}$ | Transfer s.d. | Occupational $\bar{x}$ | Occupational s.d. | df | t |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| No. of years mother worked | 3.95 | 2.00 | 3.64 | 2.12 | 107 | -.77 |
| Mother's occupation | 21.86 | 25.57 | 25.55 | 28.90 | 107 | .71 |
| Mother working now | 1.45 | .50 | 1.43 | .50 | 107 | -.13 |

Although some of the mothers of the women in the sample were themselves in non-traditional occupations and had worked quite continuously during their married lives, there was no association between their own work histories and whether their daughters planned further education or more immediate entry into the work force.

Implications of the Study

The results of this study tentatively suggest the influence which family background variables may have on career development of two-year college women. Since there was a lack of complete correspondence of the results of the present study with the findings of previous research conducted with four-year college women, two-year college women appear to be a separate population. It was noted that family educational and income levels of the two-year college group were generally lower than those of women in four-year colleges and universities. In any investigation of socialization factors influential in career process, allowance should be made for such basic differences. For example, the results of the present study point out that while the relationship between the number of years a mother has been employed since marriage and her daughter's higher degree of career commitment implies a modeling influence of the mother on her child, this relationship appears to take the form of the modeling of the attitude toward combining work and family rather than a direct modeling influence of mother's actual occupation. It is likely that the amount of direct modeling influence is limited in this instance since the college women in the study already differed from the majority of their mothers in the amount of education attained. Consequently, greater education and training permits the two-year college women to choose from a wider range of occupational possibilities than would be open to their mothers. Thus the exploration of

socialization influences relative to careers should distinguish the attitudes and values which may be communicated by the parent as well as the parent's actual characteristics.

The concept of career commitment also appears to hold promise for application to career theory for women. Vocational theory based upon men assumes that a man will participate in the labor force throughout his active years. However, continuous employment is more of a life-planning problem for women than it is for men. Although many women are now electing full or part-time employment, the prevalence of the homemaker role attests that labor market participation is not continuous for all women. The results of the present study suggest that a woman may express a higher degree of career commitment if her mother has been employed for longer time periods since marriage. However, further investigation of this relationship is necessary in order to distinguish and elaborate on women's life plans. While a young woman may indicate her present career choice and obtain education and training as preparation for entry into this vocation, it is not known whether she intends long-term commitment to this particular career or whether her commitment is actually to membership in the labor force in general. Thus, it may be possible to discern two types of career commitment among women, first, that which applies to a particular career and second, that which designates the desire to be employed.

Since two-year college women may form a separate population from high school girls or four-year college women, the findings of this research carry special implications for educational practitioners.

In contrast to four-year college and university students, many of whose parents were also college-educated, the present data reveal that the two-year college women plan for generally higher educational levels than the levels attained by their parents and appear to be upwardly mobile in their career and educational aspirations. However, certain characteristics of the two-year college may be responsible for a number of these dissimilarities. Many programs of the two-year college involve specialized vocational training which begins early in the woman's college experience. In such programs little time is available for exploration of a wide assortment of subject or career areas. In contrast, the four-year college student often devotes the first few college semesters to general or liberal studies, specializing or selecting career-related subjects only in the latter part of the college program. Consequently, the two-year college woman may enter college with a more definite career choice which is confirmed through exposure to course content and contact with others with similar goals. Women who enter such specialized career programs without full and accurate career information may find it difficult to enter other programs without loss of credit and time if they later change their objectives.

Since the working mothers in the study have daughters who anticipate work as part of their future lives, the influence of these and other role models cannot be underestimated. At present, other than their mothers the most available adult role models for young women are

found in the traditional women's occupations of teaching, nursing, library work, retail sales and clerical work. Since growth rate projections for these "women's occupations" are mixed, changes in manpower requirements and demand may make it more difficult for women to find jobs related to their abilities and to avoid increased competition for available jobs. Consequently, young women need exposure to a wider variety of role-models as well as increased information, support, and encouragement from faculty and counselors concerning entrance into the non-traditional occupational areas where role-models are few.

It may require special advising and career counseling services for these women to acquaint them with the many educational and career options open to them since this information is less likely to have been provided by parental experience and example. Expansion of career awareness and career information efforts at elementary and secondary school levels may aid the young woman who is confronted with a decision about specific vocational training at the post-secondary level to make a more informed decision. However, concentrated efforts should be made to reach not only the undecided or confused students but also those women who have high aspirations and more definite career plans to help them anticipate and overcome problems of entering non-traditional career areas as well as a critical examination of the options in combining marriage and family responsibilitie

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